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SCHOOL INTEGRATION AND NUMBERS.

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THE PRIMARY AIM OF THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS TALENT SEARCH PROGRAM IS TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF POTENTIALLY ABLE DISADVANTAGED NEGRO STUDENTS ENROLLED IN INDEPENDENT SECONDARY SCHOOLS. TO ACCOMPLISH THIS GOAL, INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS MIGHT INITIATE A SPECIAL NEGRO SCHOLARSHIP DRIVE. ALSO, COLLEGES MIGHT ENCOURAGE PROSPECTIVE NEGRO FRESHMEN BY PROVIDING THEM WITH SCHOLARSHIPS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS WHERE THEY WILL RECEIVE THE NECESSARY COLLEGE PREPARATION. ALTHOUGH THE NEGRO STUDENT ENROLLED IN A PRIVATE SCHOOL MIGHT REQUIRE EXTRA TUTORING, THE ADDITIONAL EFFORT MAY BE EXTREMELY REWARDING BOTH TO THE STUDENT AND TO THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED HIM. MOREOVER, MORE NEGROES SHOULD BE ENROLLED IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS TO DEMONSTRATE TO WHITE AND NEGRO STUDENTS ALIKE THAT INTEGRATION IS A NECESSARY PART OF ANY DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL BULLETIN," VOLUME 25, NUMBER 3, FEBRUARY 1966. (LB)

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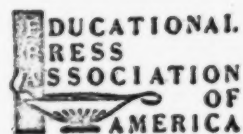
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School Integration and Numbers

By CHARLES MERRILL

ALLOW me five minutes of evangelism on the issue of numbers of Negro students in member schools of the Independent Schools Talent Search Program. When Howard Jones¹ and Jim Simmons² spoke of a target of 1200 such students in our schools by 1968, even if not all of them were Negro, I know that each one of us silently asked ourselves just what is our absorptive limit. At Commonwealth School last year, when we were feeling glum, we were sure that we had badly over-committed ourselves. When we were in good spirits, however, we felt that we could take on twice the number. Let me touch on three sides of this problem of Negro assimilation, for my message is that we can commit our schools to a much higher quota than we may be willing to set.

The Financial Side

WE all have our private agony about deficits and resent the way that Negro scholarship students, even with aid from the Office of Economic Opportunity, will just make things worse. Two approaches, nevertheless, might be of some use. The first is a special Negro scholarship drive among present and alumni parents. The race issue is the major ordeal of American life today. Almost everyone realizes that the first battle line for a reasonable facing up to this challenge appears in the schools. Therefore, why should not the schools ask for special help, specifically limited so that this appeal does not cut into the regular fund drive?

Also, if a well-educated Negro student is a valuable piece of property to a college, why is it not possible to look for help from college scholarship funds to help

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Mr. Merrill, Headmaster of Commonwealth School, Boston, Massachusetts, delivered this talk at a meeting of the trustees of the Independent Schools Talent Search Program last September.

February 1966

ISTSP

Founded in 1963, the Independent Schools Talent Search Program has met with widespread enthusiasm and has expanded from twenty-one to more than sixty member schools. It is the task of Talent Search to discover the more able students from deprived circumstances and to insure that their potential will not be lost by placing them in one of the schools that supports ISTSP.

Some of the students need a period of intense preparation before they can enter independent schools. These boys and girls are enrolled in the A B(etter) C(hance) summer programs at Dartmouth College and Mount Holyoke College.

educate this student? One university near Boston stated that fourteen out of fifteen Negro freshmen were in serious academic difficulties by the end of last year. Failure like this benefits no one. A pattern of cooperation between school and college whereby a good individual from a poor background is prepared for entrance to that college, and with the school's financial investment partly backed by the college's resources, is worth exploring.

The Academic Side

ONE unspoken statement that I seemed to hear from Commonwealth teachers last year was "How do you expect me to do my best with the best students we have and still find time for repair work with these children?" A perfectly reasonable statement. And some classes in Spanish and algebra suffered because the teacher had to face the question of "Either I lose Doreen completely or I drive the class to distraction."

There is no easy answer. The difference of background did force a lot of extra tutoring upon the staff, although we received help from a couple of parents and the abler and older students. And it did them no harm to feel responsible for the success of a school-mate.

When partial success did come, it brought real joy. The girl I accepted from Canton, Mississippi, was the most hopeless student I've ever touched. Under the impact of the Mississippi way of life, ignorance had become stupidity. Even though I tried to tell myself that stupidity is a defense for the Negro penalized for initiative, curiosity, and ambition, it did not make this error of judgment more bearable. We invested a heavy amount of every sort of tutoring in that girl. She longed for an education. Every night before she went to bed she looked over all the new words written down that day in her notebook. She received honest friendliness, not just condescension, from the other students. She had a certain natural style and she began to be more sure of herself; she began to smile and hold her shoulders back and feel free to disagree. This summer she went back home and noticed how she had changed even if Canton had not. She was accepted, with a generous scholarship, at Hinckley School in Maine and was given more good training in math and English and in jobs that demanded responsibility. At the end of the summer, I received a letter saying "I don't want to be treated special any more. I can stand on my own feet." And she does, a stubborn, sensible, handsome girl, trying to work out specific ways to turn C papers into B papers, discussing her college plans, which now seem perfectly reasonable ones. I loathe the automatic expectation of a happy ending for all examples of social risk-taking, yet what joy has been the teachers' who have helped unlock the doors for this girl. And some benefit has accrued to some classmates, whose contempt for the inarticulate—a price we pay for the intellectualism of the 1960's—has been affected a bit by their respect for the distance Doreen has come.

The Social Side

By going from two and three Negroes to nine and ten in a school of ninety-five students, we made a marked social change. First of all, the lone individual could protect himself with the defenses of a community. At lunch he could sit with his white friends or with his Negro friends. Walking down to the soccer field, he could make the same choice. He wasn't isolated in a sea of white faces. He wasn't on parade all the time. Second, the Negro student, as well as the school, was freed from the terror of failure, which meant not merely the failure of an individual

but the failure of a race and of an idea. We dropped two boys for inability or unwillingness to carry the load, but the first girl of ours ever accepted at Swarthmore was a Negro. And the first prefect to run all the work jobs at our country weekend last October, the highest post we can give a boy, is a Negro. Success balances failure on a human, not a symbolic, level. And last, the larger number of Negro students freed our white students from a picture of the Negro as a Platonic abstraction. These schoolmates are middle class and working class, Northern and Southern, assimilationist and nationalist, ready to learn about Mozart or reluctant to step a foot from rock and roll.

I have become a crank and a nuisance on this issue of numbers. The school that accepted one Negro child last year, two for this, and three for the coming year is taking modest yet firm steps forward. But it is also slipping backward. The reality of exploding demands by our Negro minority, of the increasingly bitter alienation from what we like to consider the American way of life, means that we simply cannot be satisfied with the prudent caution and optimism of 1955. Last winter I spoke with an education officer of our local NAACP to ask for help in locating scholarship applicants for private schools in the Boston area. "If you want me to supply you with a nice bright boy with a grateful smile and shined shoes, you should have come around a long time ago," was the reply. "The situation is too serious now. I'm not interested in any educational program that doesn't reach deep down into real numbers."

Given our limited resources and given the crippling effect of schools and streets and homes shaped by racial injustice, we are never going to reach more than a small fraction of the Negro children who need better schooling. But within these limitations we can carry our full weight. If in every classroom, in every team, in every activity, our white students are working with one or two or three Negro teammates, not only do we have a chance of convincing these former outsiders that we mean what we say, we also help to convince the white students that no community, no job, no political action in a democratic society has real meaning without the same sort of integration. For when we finally break through the chains of racism—and ISTSP is a small but useful tool for helping to break these chains—the people who will be freed will be not simply our Negro fellow citizens; they will be ourselves.